

Viggo Mortensen

Justice

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**Justification
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Justice**

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Edited by Viggo Mortensen

Department for Theology and Studies

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Foreword

by Viggo Mortensen

There is a growing conviction that today justice is one of the central themes in the theological discussions within the ecumenical movement. As formulated by Konrad Raiser, "So there exists today wide ecumenical agreement that commitment to justice is a direct consequence of Christian belief¹."

But what is justice? How does it relate to the central insight that Christians are justified by faith? What consequences does this insight have for our contemporary deliberations on how to be co-creators and co-workers in God's justice? Since the insight that comes with the term justification is at the core of the Lutheran heritage it is vital for Lutherans to deal with these issues.

Furthermore it is said that "even the future of the ecumenical movement itself will in one way or another be determined by the way it deals with the question of the relationship between justification and justice²".

The general impression is that the above mentioned ecumenical consensus is threatened. Although I believe that it is fair to say that today's world is juster than it has ever been, it is also quite clear that we still are far removed from a world in which justice reigns. The increasing number of people's uprisings, growing na-

¹ Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?* WCC Publications, Geneva, Switzerland, 1991, p. 17.

² Jacob Tesfai, "Justification and Justice - an Ecumenical Focus", in *Ecumenical Trends*, Vol 20, No 10, 1991.

tionalist tendencies and the ever widening gap between the North and the South indicate just how far away we are from the utopian goal of a just world. Where does that leave us? We are left in this fallen world, justified by the grace of God and committed to the daily struggle to create a little more justice.

A further reason why the consensus is threatened might be the fact that there may have been consensus on the word as such but not always on the content of the word. A common definition of justice, developed in political and social theory is offered in this booklet, namely: "the fitting assignments of rights and duties to persons who participate in society as free and equal agents". The operative question is whether this idea of fair distributive justice can be applied to the wider context when for instance the question of a more just world order is raised. Or, do Christians have a special insight into what justice is all about because they are justified?

By taking up the classic problem of justification and justice and giving it some thought we are hoping to contribute to the ongoing debate where we — confronted by new challenges — do not want to lose what we think we have already gained, namely the realization that justification and justice belong together.

The reason why the Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) presents this booklet now is because the question of justice in relation to development and humanitarian aid was subject of a seminar held during the meeting of the Lutheran World Federation's Council in Madras, India, in September 1992. It is the DTS's contribution to this seminar.

At the seminar, the keynote speaker, the highly respected Indian theologian M M Thomas, offered his vision of "a secular *koinonia* centered around the concept of justice".

Justice is not only the goal of development but the overriding factor that prompts us to be involved in development. In fact, justice should become the starting

point and the foundation for our involvement in humanitarian assistance and development³.

Thus it becomes clear that also when we are talking about development and humanitarian aid justice is and should be at the center. In addition it indirectly stresses the fundamental relationship between the ongoing struggle for justice and the concept of justification, a cornerstone of the Lutheran reformation.

³ Paper presented to the LWF Council in Madras, 1992.



"We Seek Justice Freely Because We Have Been Freely Justified"

Introducing a theme

by *Viggo Mortensen*

Justification

If correctly understood justification says all there is to say about the relationship between God and human beings. This is also the reason why the Reformers said that justification by faith is "the article by which the church will stand or fall". Nevertheless in order to understand this article correctly one must understand it fully. A more comprehensive understanding is given in the statement "justification by grace alone, for Christ's sake, through faith active in good works."

Luther himself had a very comprehensive understanding of justification, meaning that the article on justification is to permeate the whole of creation. As Luther bluntly states: Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation.

It is the sinner who is declared righteous and at the same time made righteous. The human being must first of all be made good in order to do good, as portrayed in the image of the good tree that brings forth good fruit (Matthew 7:16-20). The starting point for our lives as Christians is this complete act of justification. Full assurance of salvation thus rests wholly upon God's word which accomplishes what it says not through our own faith or by our good works. The Christian remains *simul iustus et peccator*, at one and the same time both just and a sinner, and therefore in need of daily repentance and renewal. This has profound implications on the Christian's life. It means that we are free to serve

our neighbor only when our pride and egocentricity are broken by the act of justification. Then, by God's grace, we can become channels through which God's agape flows to the benefit of our neighbor¹. From God to humanity and out to the world's needs; that is the direction.

In all respects and at all times, in thoughts, words and deeds, a person is justified only by grace through faith, which is never a meritorious work on the person's part, since it is the work of God in him or her.²

The human being, being God's creature, has not created him/herself. It is the human being who has been given everything and he/she is also responsible for the use or misuse of what he/she has been given. We are not our own masters or mistresses but will be held accountable by God, the giver and sustainer of life.

Yet, it is this very thought, namely that we are accountable to someone else, a transcendent God, which the so called "modern person" at times finds hard to understand. Why? The answer to this is that we like to see ourselves as being the masters and mistresses of the universe. This is why we close our eyes to the most obvious fact of all, that we are totally dependent on the creator and on the gifts of the creator.

Therefore, if we are totally dependent on God the most important thing is of course to be known and accepted by God. Sometimes, so it is said, mere acceptance is not enough. Seen from a strictly Lutheran point of view this is wrong since it is mere acceptance that justification is all about. To be justified in relation to God is to be accepted by God as his creature.

1 "Denn die Kreaturen sind nur die Hand, Rohre und Mittel, dadurch Gott alles gibt", *Grosser Katechismus*, BSLK, p. 566.

2 Martin J Heineken, in *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, J Macquarrie & James Childress (eds), SCM Press Ltd, London, 1986, p. 333.

Let God be God

The word just is incorporated in the word justification. What is most important in relation to God is to realize that everything is God's free gift, both what we are and what we do. In biblical terms, this is faith. To live in faith is to be just in response to the grace of God. And to be justified is by the grace of God to live in faith, even if one has turned away from God, believing that one can handle things oneself.

Despite the fact that sin is forgiven, it still remains. Because Luther radicalized the doctrine of justification it influences all the other aspects of theology. His preferred model was of a paradoxical identical nature: *Simul iustus et peccator* (at one and the same time both just and a sinner) Here, sin is basically unbelief and *incurvatus in se*; it grounds in the wish to be God and thus a refusal to let God be God. If the sinner accepts God's judgment over his/her life it enables him/her in spite of sin to live righteously.

When for the sake of Christ the sinner is acquitted and has gracefully accepted this as a gift of God, then he or she lives in faith. Although sin is still in him/her it can no longer separate him/her from God, but is subject to the good and daily struggle wherefrom the good works should go forth. Although the good works are performed by sinners they are not necessarily sinful. This is due to the good work of the Holy Spirit. This new obedience called forth and sustained by the Holy Spirit is the vital force in a Christian's life.

Justification automatically leads to freedom. The freedom of a Christian. This freedom should be put into practice when dealing with one's fellow human beings. The good works are not added to faith even as its consequence, faith is only present as it is alive in works. Rather, like the sun is never without its brilliance, faith is not without its works. The reality behind the term justification might of course also be phrased in other ways. A rich imagery is used in the New Testament in order to bring out the substance of the Gospel. When one then tries to work with this imagery

and eventually creates new pictures to give content to the old understanding this may give rise to some debate about what are the right and good imageries. We always have the tradition on the condition of interpretation. Only an interpreted tradition is a tradition which one can live by.

Justification in the LWF

To my knowledge Lutherans have always kept alive this central insight of the Reformation and the understanding of justification by faith. In the Lutheran communion, which the LWF serves, it has sometimes taken different forms and expressions³.

It should be mentioned here that although the justification issue has been central to some of the dialogue work it was not treated as a Lutheran speciality, but rather as a theme that could promote a true ecumenical dialogue. And rightly so, for also in the

³ A consultation with the theme "Justification and our Responsibility for the World" (*Rechtfertigung und Weltverantwortung*) was held in Germany, Neuendettelsau, in September 1991. In part the report of this consultation gives the impression that the issue of justification by faith alone is no longer at the top of the agenda of the communion of Lutheran churches nor of the Lutheran World Federation. As is understood from the above, this is a grave accusation. The fact that it does not reflect the essence is documented in the following. Also in the ecumenical dialogues conducted by the LWF over the years, especially regarding the dialogue with the Roman Catholics, it has always been the underlying understanding that justification is the most important Reformation principle. In the Malta Report (1972) it is stated that "Lutheran theologians emphasize that the event of justification is not limited to the individual forgiveness of sins and they do not see in it a purely external declaration of the justification of the sinner. It is rather the righteousness of God actualized in the Christ event conveyed to the sinner through the message of justification as an encompassing reality basic to the new life of the believer." In his interesting article, "Justification and Justice — an Ecumenical Focus" (see note 2 in the Foreword) Yacob Tesfai has shown how this theme has played a major role in the interconfessional dialogues.

Lutheran understanding, justification by faith is at the very core of the one holy catholic church of which the LWF and its member churches are a part.

Although in recent years frequent attempts were made to talk out of justification rather than about it, it was clear that this was the basis for the statements made. Several examples of this can be cited. Let us for instance look at the much debated Curitiba Assembly. Here are some typical quotations from the President's address:

Lutheran ethics is an ethics of service to this world. Christians are free, therefore, to turn their attention to the needs of this world. As Martin Luther never tired of insisting: if their concern is for salvation only by faith in Jesus Christ who has done everything necessary for their salvation, they now have energy and capacity left over to devote to their neighbors in order "to become a Christ to them"⁴.

This leads Bishop Hanselmann to a very thoughtful deliberation on the same theme in liberation theology:

Our starting point must be that all human liberation already presupposes the freedom which is the gift of God. God has been gracious to us and thereby delivered us from the vicious circle of our self-absorption. That rules out any need for us to employ our own resources in the all-out endeavor to achieve our own salvation. We are now free to turn to the world and equipped to respond fully to its challenges and to act accordingly. Clearly, therefore, justification by grace cannot be an excuse for any passivity in ethical questions, for the acceptance of the injustices of the world⁵.

⁴ *I Have Heard the Cry of My People*, Curitiba 1990, Proceedings of the Eighth Assembly, Lutheran World Federation, LWF Report 28/29, December 1990, pp. 3ff.

⁵ Ibid.

I find this is a sound Lutheran response to a much debated issue.

This is furthermore reflected in the General Secretary's address, where he struggles to combine the things which should never fall apart in a Christian's belief and life:

Neither a politicized church nor a privatized Christian faith does justice to a concept of the church as the communion of the faithful. We need a piety or a spirituality able to integrate the role of faith, prayer and the mystery of the church's sacramental life with a God-willed struggle for justice and peace. Whenever these two aspects are separated caricatures of biblical Christianity are the result. When the church refuses its responsibility for its socio-political context, it ceases to be light and salt. Where the church simply lusts after political power and privilege, it ceases to nurture the community of faith⁶.

On the whole it can be said that the very serious discussion on how to overcome the separation that has haunted the endeavors to bring the whole Gospel to the whole of God's people has in recent years been typical of a number of theological debates in the LWF.

As already mentioned, for Luther justification also included the problem of justice. Sometimes this is forgotten. But as Ronald F Thiemann who gave the keynote address reminded us in Curitiba:

The fact that we gather here as Lutherans is both a burden and an opportunity. Since its earliest days our tradition has been associated with a tendency to separate religious and political matters, to keep justification and justice clearly distinct. According to Luther the righteousness of faith must be clearly distinguished from civic righteousness if the purity of the gospel is to be maintained. The righteousness of faith is a pure gift of God mediated through the work of Christ. The

⁶ Ibid., pp. 9ff.

transformation from unrighteousness to righteousness takes place through the declarative act of God in Christ; in that act the sinner remains perfectly passive as God alone acts to justify.⁷

And he goes on:

Indeed, the future of world Lutheranism depends in large part on the way in which we understand the vocation and mission to which God is calling us in a world so desperately in need of the healing power of the gospel⁸.

By intending to do something about the injustices prevalent in the world one does not violate the doctrine of justification by faith alone. On the contrary, this effort can be carried out much more vigorously now that we know that it is done out of grace. As Ronald F Thiemann forcefully stated in Curitiba:

Because we know that God will remain faithful to his promises, we are liberated from the devastating fear that the accomplishment of justice in the world depends solely upon our efforts. The primacy and priority of God's grace frees us from the self-defeating effort of seeking our salvation in the quest for justice. Since our salvation has been secured by Christ's death and resurrection, we are now free to seek justice for the neighbor in need. At this essential point it is proper to distinguish (though not to separate) justification and justice. We seek justice freely, because we have been freely justified. We seek to be a communion of steadfast love, because we are the recipients of God's steadfast love. We seek to be faithful covenant partners, because God's faithfulness will endure forever⁹.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 19ff.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 19ff.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 19ff.

And also after Curitiba the Lutheran insights have continued to guide the work of the Federation. A paper on Mission and Evangelization, prepared by the staff of the Department for Theology and Studies was presented to the Council at its meeting in Chicago in 1991. The true Lutheran confession based on a distinction between doctrine and life was reflected in a truly Lutheran distinction between works and faith:

Luther taught us to differentiate between *iustitia coram deo* (justice before God) and *iustitia coram mundo* (justice before human beings). God's justice is not the result of moral endeavors. "For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Rom 3:22-24, RSV). This is a crucial differentiation because it can save us from making political or ethical decisions as prerequisites for justification before God. "Just works" are the consequence of justification *sola gratia*, and not dependent on it. They are the "fruit of faith" in an as yet unredeemed world¹⁰.

This indicates that also in recent years substantial work has been done on central dogmatic and Christian issues. However, it is sometimes done in places where it was not visible earlier. Therefore, one should look carefully and not be carried away by emotionally charged press reports.

Justice

No concept is more debated in social ethics than the concept of justice. In spite of this one has to admit that on this subject "a lack of common understanding [is] still evident in the ecumenical

¹⁰ In *Minutes of the Meeting of the LWF Council*, Chicago, Illinois, 1991, Exhibit 10.

movement"¹¹. Different notions of justice are to be found already in the Bible but there are also common traits. Justice is always a relational concept. When all relations are whole, then justice prevails. God is the ultimate creator of justice; but as he is just and justifies people, it is the obligation of the people to create justice. When unjust structures prevent the morally good life from developing then it is the Christian's obligation to try to transform the structures so that they promote justice. The just and righteous God remains faithful to the relationship which he established with his creatures. Thus God's justice may be expressed in deeds that liberate the weak and vulnerable as well as in the judgment of people's unfaithfulness. Both expressions reflect God's role as the Lord of a covenant relationship. Accordingly, the justice of human activity is measured by its faithfulness to the covenanting God.

The exact character of the link between human justice and its source in correspondence to the being of God may vary in the different Christian traditions. If one looks at church history one sees that all the possibilities for relating divine and human justice to one another have been explored. The traditional Lutheran solution to this problem is to maintain a dialectical relationship. This has sometimes led to the legitimation of a dualistic opposition between divine justice, concerning the individual souls and personal relations and human justice dealing with rigid, arbitrary laws in economics and politics. But Luther should not be understood in this way. As already mentioned he saw the closest possible connection between justification by faith and justice. Set free to do justice is his formula. Naturally the question that arises is: What does justice mean? The extended discussions in philosophy, theology and sociology indicate that it is a difficult question. Aristotle distinguished between general

¹¹ U Duchrow in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, N Lossky, José Míguez Bonino, John Pobee, Tom Stransky, Geoffrey Wainwright, Pauline Webb (eds), WCC Publications, Geneva and William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1991, p. 554.

legal justice (righteousness) and particular justice divided into commutative and distributive justice. Commutative justice focuses on the relationship of the members of society with one another (contract, civil law). Distributive justice focuses on the community's distribution of benefits.

Justice can both be a norm for human moral agency and a virtue of the moral agent. As a virtue it is a character trait by which a person is disposed to act in ways conducive to human flourishing, meaning impartially to render to each being his or her due. As a Christian virtue, justice should be shaped and directed by charity, the love of God and the neighbor. In modern moral philosophy there is a trend towards an ethic of virtue¹². It is a trend which is to be welcomed from the perspective of a Christian ethic. The Christian ethic has always known that a good person does good, wherefore it is important to make the person good (justification). But the trend towards an ethic of virtue could end up to be both too narrow and individualistic. So the concept of justice as a virtue and a personal norm has to be complemented with an understanding of justice as the norm for the governing of all human relationships. Then it can also be seen as the normative principle for the ordering and distribution of social benefits. Justice then concerns the fitting assignments of rights and duties to persons who participate in society as free and equal agents.

12 Cf. Alisdair McIntyre, *After Virtue*

Justice and Justification

A reflection on dogma

by Juhani Forsberg

1. The problem

While on the one hand the question of justice and justification has been classic in Lutheran theology, with the present situation of the world and the church these two terms have on the other hand found themselves in a new context and have thus repeatedly been called into play in the last few years. Even in that new context we have to take the classical dogmatic content of the question seriously unless we are willing to think that the new context has outdated the old content. In the following paper I have therefore once again taken up the classical Lutheran doctrine within the field covered by these two terms, justice and justification, and I have tried at the end to relate them briefly to the new context.

2. Distinct but not divorced

"Justice and justification" can be regarded as one pair of terms among many others that are essential for understanding and describing the Lutheran view of faith. Other corresponding pairs of terms are e.g. "law and gospel", "faith and love", "the two kingdoms". It is true that all these pairs of terms must be distinguished from each other. But it is also true that they may not be divorced from each other, because they necessarily belong together. Lately the American Lutheran systematic theologian Carl E Braaten has emphasized this fact very strongly in his book, *Justification: The Article by which the Church Stands or Falls* (1990). It is not hard to perceive that both the separation and mixing of this pair of terms have far-reaching consequences for

the view we take of faith and for ethics. As is well-known, Ronald F Thiemann, in his main paper at the Curitiba Assembly of the LWF in 1990, also tried to build a bridge between justification and justice. He did this with the theological concept of covenant, in which the question of the distinction did remain to some extent in the background even though it was not left out of account.

But the question becomes even more complicated when we remember that in classical Lutheran theology some terms also appear which can have several meanings. One of these is in fact "justice". In the use of this term we have to know exactly whether we mean the *righteousness*¹ which bestows gifts and is redemptive (*iustitia passiva*) or the demanding justice of God (*iustitia activa*). From the anthropological angle, Luther himself made the distinction between the first and second justice (*duplex iustitia*). The first justice (cf. righteousness) is the full and pure gift of God which is accepted without human beings adding anything to it, and which is valid only in God's presence. But in the second justice human beings work with God and it has validity in the presence of other human beings.

The difference between faith and love and their homogeneity are wholly homologous. According to Luther's Reformation view of faith human beings are redeemed through faith alone without the works of the law. Faith alone, and not primarily the faith that is "formed" by love, makes human beings just (or righteous). The works of love grow spontaneously out of faith like the fruits on the tree. The man (or woman) of faith is however always *simul iustus et peccator* (at one and the same time both just and a sinner) and must always remain confronted by the dual command

¹ English linguistic usage in biblical references often requires "righteousness" rather than "justice". This practice has been followed where necessary, for the adjective "righteous" also. (Righteousness is of course *not* the same as *self-righteousness*.) Cf. also Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies*, London, 1953 [Translator's note].

of love. But even within the concept of faith Luther wanted to make a corresponding distinction anthropologically. In his great commentary on Galatians he makes this distinction by talking about an "absolute" faith (*fides absoluta*) and about an "incarnated" faith (*fides incarnata*). To Luther it seemed necessary to talk about absolute faith, so that the nature of faith and of God's distributive justice as a gift might continue to have full force. But in the case of an actual human being faith must always be incarnated; that is, genuine faith always produces also the fruits of faith, works of love.

3. The real presence of God in faith

In incarnated faith however we are not dealing with figurative language. The real reason for the homogeneity of faith and love lies in the fact that Christ himself is really present in faith. In "happy exchange" Christ takes our sin upon himself and gives himself to us with all his gifts. In his work on the Lord's Supper (1528) Luther expresses himself very emphatically on how the Triune God gives himself to us with all his gifts. The real presence of God himself is underlined by the fact that justice and love are not only qualities or gifts of God but that God himself is love and justice.

The real presence of Christ in faith is the most important *theologoumenon* which enables us to see how justification and justice are inseparable. If justification is seen only as a forensic act in which God declares sinful human beings to be just, then it is much more difficult to connect justification and justice with each other. Justification is then only a relation between the just God and sinful humanity, but human beings are never really justified -- made just (or righteous). Luther still kept together the forensic aspect of justice and its aspect of real presence. For later Lutheranism and for Lutheran orthodoxy Melanchthon's doctrine of justification became authoritative. In this, justification is a forensic act and sanctification as a renewal of life is only a fruit of justification.

4. To separate or to fuse?

The Lutheran distinctions are not easy to explain nor to understand even if they were to be given a strictly logical classification. Lutheran orthodoxy tried this but the results of its work cannot be repeated. Luther himself also used syllogisms and other logical sequences up to a certain point. But in addition he always wanted to express his central ideas on faith with the aid of metaphors and paradoxes. His findings may therefore be more fruitful even today than the strict systematic approach of Lutheran orthodoxy. Even the need for "distinctions" may be seen as a protection against false alternatives. The false alternatives are chosen if gospel and law, faith and love, justification and (demanding) justice are either separated or fused.

The separation of faith and love or law and gospel easily takes place where we talk merely of the character of faith as a gift and where (for instance) it is asserted that in this world questions of justice appertain only to society or the state but not to Christians or the church. In the history of Lutheran theology there are sufficient examples of the fatal dichotomizing of life into an internal and external, a spiritual and a corporeal sphere. There is also a "Christian" indifference to the suffering of the neighbor and of the Two-Thirds World and an uncritical attitude towards a lavish lifestyle. They are the consequence of a false separation of faith and love.

The dangerous fusion of law and gospel occurs where justice among human beings, or good works in the sight of God, are seen as a condition for the eternal salvation of human beings. This fusion, however, is seldom expressed so baldly. Mostly it appears in more refined forms. In many Christian environmental programs the gospel of God's salvation becomes merely a jejune preamble for programs for the salvation of the world -- which in themselves are excellent, but it often happens at the same time that even the central Christian expressions for the unconditional goodness of God acquire a new content and the gospel is in practice transformed into a prerequisite for immanent -- intramundane -- salvation, and therefore into law. Twenty years ago the

joyous message was turned into law when everyone who sought to bear the name of Christian was called upon to identify themselves as a priority with a certain political ideology. Now it is easy for any idea of justice between human beings to be declared divine justice, and the efforts towards that justice are regarded as a mark of the genuine Christian, i.e. of a justified human being.

5. They belong together

If in the two terms "justice and justification" justice means God's justice in giving, then in both of them we are talking about one and the same thing: the justification of the ungodly through faith for Christ's sake. Here the *righteousness* of Christ is our *righteousness*, because he is our representative with the Father and frees us from judgment. Christ himself is our righteousness in that he takes our sin upon himself and gives himself to us with all his gifts and dwells in us. Christ is our righteousness, our salvation and our life in that he conquers death, the devil and the powers of chaos and makes us sharers in his victory.

Today the Lutheran community must also ask whether it is so difficult to speak about justification and justice belonging together because we have lost our joy over the righteousness that is bestowed by God. Thus it is not simply a question of the way in which we might find a link between justification and justice but of a widespread inability to consider the justification of sinners as a primary concern of Christianity at all. Why are Lutherans unable to discover and use either old or new terms in order to rejoice together with God and with the angels in heaven over one sinner who repents and returns to his (or her) Father's house (Luke 15)? And why do new terms, laboriously selected, so easily come up against the danger of distorting the content of the gospel? Why – even in the Lutheran communion – is it easier today to draft "commitments" than to praise God for his justice in giving?

It has been asserted that the cause of these difficulties is the change of paradigms between the Reformation period and our

present age. In the Reformation period the question was: "How do I find a gracious God?" The answer to this question was the justification of sinners. Today people ask, "Is there really a God who has some kind of involvement with this world, seeing that it is so full of injustice and all kinds of evil?" And because this question, which is in itself an old one (theodicy), can find no generally acceptable answer, we are left at best with a struggle against injustice by believers, agnostics and unbelievers. As an alternative this change of paradigms has also been rightly challenged, and in any event one may doubt whether it would cause the doctrine of justification to lose its relevance.

6. Do they belong together?

The question of the homogeneity of justice and justification is difficult because of these two terms justice can also be understood as the second kind of justice, *iustitia activa*, the justice of the law and the justice between human beings, and clearly is also mostly understood in this way. The cause of the difficulty lies in the fact that there is a shift from homogeneity to fusion and so from the righteousness of God to self-justification. But since it is equally dangerous to separate the terms, we have to ask how they can in fact be homogeneous – how they can belong together.

First of all it is clear that they belong together in a negative way. Here the negative element is sin. Sin is the revolt of human beings against God and his commandment. The command of God is, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30f.). Sin is the turning of human beings away from God and their neighbor. The initial sin is that I do not trust in God and do not love God. But if I reject my fellow human beings in their suffering and tribulation and do not love them as I love myself, then I sin not only against my neighbor but also against God and his commandment. Thus the injustice between myself and my neighbor, which I have caused, makes me guilty before God and I

can escape from this guilt only through God's forgiveness, even where I make restitution to my neighbor for the injustice I have caused.

Secondly, however, the dual command to love also offers a positive opportunity to link justification and justice. The commandment calls for a justice which gives everyone what is their own (*suum cuique*). Thus justice is related both to God and to our neighbor. The commandment demands that human beings should give both God and their neighbor what is rightly theirs. The commandment calls for a love that seeks not its own but what is God's and the neighbor's, and voluntarily gives itself to all and places itself in the service of all. Justice towards God means that we give ourselves wholly back to God and hold nothing back. Justice towards our neighbor on the other hand means that we give ourselves to our neighbor in love and service. Human beings, however, cannot act justly – "fulfill all righteousness" – towards God in such a way as to be able to give something from outside, whether good works, virtues or property. That would be the way of the "righteousness which is by works" and self-justification. Human beings act justly towards God only by giving themselves wholly to God. But is this possible only through faith. Righteousness towards God means that human beings let God be God and in everything place their trust in God, receiving his good gifts with gratitude and praise.

Thirdly the connection between justification and justice in the world lies in the fact that those who are justified by faith are free to struggle for justice. That is implied in Luther's treatise on freedom, which has to be repeatedly relearned in the Lutheran communion. Because justification is wholly an act of God, Christians neither need nor have to struggle for *righteousness* in order to be saved thereby. But at the same time it is obvious that, paradoxically, this third connection enables us clearly to perceive a distinction: because the first kind of justice cannot be effected by human beings like the second.

7. Individually and in common

In the theological inheritance of the Reformation the relation between justification and justice has been handled in such a way that despite the possible change of paradigms it can still be relevant in the life of individual Christians. But it never remains free of difficulties and paradoxes, especially as regards the way people lead their lives in practice. For instance, the spontaneity of love is an element of the biblical Reformation faith which cannot be abandoned. A good tree brings forth good fruits. But because it is also true that every Christian also brings forth bad fruits too, a Christian may not remain in a state of false complacency. The sometimes so bitter experience of Christians is that with them the second kind of justice always remains in its beginnings. They must always face up to the dual command of love afresh and let God's law speak to them.

The Reformation legacy also has much to say to the Christian community. The homogeneity of justification and justice moreover has an ecclesiological relevance. Because of the false separation of the two the Apostle Paul had to write to the community in Corinth about the demands of love. For the same reason Luther wrote against the German Fraternities because they preferred the fellowship of their colleagues to the Christian congregation with all its poor and weak members. The true Christian community (*communio*) is tested where the homogeneity of justice and justification is taken seriously. Because of the gospel we may believe that Christ does not abandon his church despite the halting change in the Christian communities and the church. But neither can the Christian community free itself from the demand of love.

The problem becomes more complicated in the human community at large, that is, on the social and political plane. Here the art of drawing distinctions must prevail. Governments cannot be justified by faith and parliaments cannot ask for the forgiveness of their sins. But the question of justice in their work is all the more urgent. Their task is to eliminate injustice and restore or create justice.

From the standpoint of the Christian faith a distinction has to be drawn between the law and the gospel or between the two "kingdoms". Without advocating now the specifically Lutheran aspects of these doctrines, the general validity of that distinction must be effectively defended, given the increasing trends towards theocracy or the various attempts at religio-political programs. Nevertheless the Christian defense of this distinction is justified only if Christians and the churches do not deviate from their responsibility for justice in this world. Furthermore Christians have the possibility of speaking and acting for justice using methods that have general validity. In abstract terms this means that Christians and the churches too act here in the realm of law and reason. Law and reason are revealed as good gifts of God where they have led to the restoration of justice. Law and reason as such serve as the basis of the theology of liberation, although even in this instance they have no force for eternal salvation.

Christians and the churches have their point of departure and basis for action in the unconditional love of God and the justification of sinners and can testify to this everywhere; but they cannot regard the specifically Christian truths as a prerequisite for the establishment of justice. Conversely, where there is social injustice, non-Christians may be able to see the sins of Christians and churches more clearly than Christians themselves. The church has the obligation, and the right, to preach God's law in the social and political sphere if it also subjects itself to that preaching at the same time.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in linking up justice and justification correctly lies in the fact that justice itself, but especially the path to justice, has become so complicated in the modern world. In his day Luther was able to preach quite directly against usury, and with good reason: but what pastor today can decide whether higher or lower interest rates lead to a more just result in a given economic situation? If I do not consume enough my brother or sister remains unemployed, yet I have already endangered nature with what I have so far consumed. Also where injustice is so manifest that it cries to high heaven, the road to

justice can be so complicated that I remain at a loss as to which practical steps I should take. What do I say to an old supporter of mission who no longer gives his support on account of real or alleged corruption; and how do I deal with my fellow-citizen who wants to reduce state development aid for the same reason? But in striving for justice we must always also have the courage to be exposed to the risks, because only those who lack faith hide the talent entrusted to them.

Although justice itself and the path to justice have become complicated, we must not make that fact a pretext for moral indifference. The modern world also has better and more incisive ways of shedding light on the causes and reasons for injustice.

Individual Christians who have been justified by faith are liberated in their consciences to campaign for the use of these methods too. Although their own outlook on the injustice of the world is circumscribed, they are justified in demanding that those who have been given a broader field of vision onto the world's injustice, but also a greater power to eliminate it, should play their part in accordance with their understanding and the uprightness of their conscience.

"The Third Bank of the River"

Thoughts on justification and justice

by Vitor Westhelle

In one of Guimarães Rosa's stories, *The Third Bank of the River*, the dilemma of modernity is presented as a parable of a man whose existence was torn between the options he had to face inhabiting simultaneously the spaces of two worlds divided by a river. His existence was split into spaces he had to conform to and in neither was he able to find an authentic expression of his self. He missed the story, the myth that could situate him, detect the territory of his being. He was incapable of answering the fundamental questions that Xenophanes said one should ask a friend: How old are you? Where do you come from? When did fear arrive? In a desperate search for the answers he exiled himself for the rest of his life to a canoe forever floating in the middle of the river: the third bank of the river.

The "disembedding" (A Giddens) of existence from its vital core, the loss of a foundational mythical nucleus, of a sense for location, or plainly the disenchantment with a world that has lost a text(ure) that weaves together a sense of belonging have been different attempts to express the vertigo of living constantly on the edges of modern existence. Long before modern criticism of religion manifested itself this sense of being exiled from the house of being, the story that situates us, marked the emergence of the modern predicament.

Justification and justice, once united by the criterion of adjustment to the medieval institutions (in which the identity between the created order of things and providence, between *lex naturae* and *lex dei*, was embodied and expressed) are now disjointed. Unless we contend ourselves to embark on the elusive quest for

the third bank of the river, let us consider what the modern disenchantment has liberated us from. The thinking about two realms in Lutheran theology has to do with the modern predicament. It signals as much the irretrievable dream about times gone by as the triumph over an age that, even if it provided a house of being, was often enough also a prison.

Luther's "Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms" is not a doctrine formulated by Luther. It is a twentieth century creation. Much less preoccupied with systematization than his twentieth century followers, Luther's concern was to express the double-sided anthropological stance that delineates simultaneous human relations to what we would now call society on the one hand and divine reality on the other: *coram mundo* and *coram deo*. The insight was an attempt to describe the "eccentric" character of the human condition: being open to the infinite and simultaneously closed to it by the immersion in the demands of quotidian experiences; the recognition of being ultimately acted upon and the simultaneous concealment of such a recognition by demonic dependence and trust in human institutions.

Nevertheless, Luther's concern was above all theological. The thinking regarding the two realms was an insight that made it possible to distinguish between the realm in which God works alone carrying forth the divine work of justification through faith and the realm in which human beings work with God as God's cooperators (*cooperator dei*) in the continuing work of creation. One of Luther's preferred metaphors to describe this double agency of God was the anthropomorphic "hands of God". The institutions that God ordered for the maintenance of human welfare are in his left hand. Following a common typology of his time, three institutions were named: *oeconomia*, *politia*, *ecclesia*. In this realm the definite criterion for ethical decisions was the achievement of equity through dialogical reason.

In the spiritual realm, located in God's "right hand", God's sovereignty worked through justification as *iustitia passiva*. Here no cooperation is allowed for. Synergism is ruled out. The human response is of a doxological not an ethical nature. In the face of

God's sole spiritual sovereignty, the human being can only render glory to whom glory is due. The spiritual principle precluded the possibility of reducing this realm to the heteronomous finitude of institutions. A doxological absence in this realm would correspond to the abjuration of reason and disregard of justice. Secularism and autonomy are as much of an evil in one realm as idolatry is in the other.

The world in which Luther proposed these distinctions was in many respects a closed world, closed around its institutional formations, namely the economy or familial nucleus (as the basis of economic activity), the state and the church. Luther did not challenge the divine foundation of these institutions as modernity would do, but introduced the idea of the transient character of worldly institutions. The modern aspect of his thought was to relativize them in the face of a spiritual principle that would guarantee the freedom of human conscience. No human authority should take from the individual the right to books (reason) and his/her own faith. Making this distinction Luther could introduce the possibility of having a language, of speaking about the spiritual presence in grace through faith in a discourse that would not conform to or be subjected to the institutional demands of society, because this presence was concealed *sub contraria specie* and praise was the only response to the Inscrutable Other. The ultimate mystery is here: we are condemned totally by the law, but simultaneously saved by the gospel. Even if in political, economic, or ecclesiastical matters he could at times be very conservative he did not believe in the absolute character of such institutions and was thus enabled to be critical of them.

The distinction between the languages concerning justification and justice had a liberating impact to the extent that it dismantled the belief in an institutional reality in which both justification and justice were supposed to be achieved by adjusting to the instituted order resulting in both a demise of the freedom of conscience and the absolutization of order.

Once modernity finally granted to individuals the right of freedom of conscience and recognized that institutions were not only relative but also transient, Luther's distinction lost its critical edge and fell into what was called a double morality. The distinction is now frequently made in terms of the separation between the public and the private realms in which the autonomy of the public sphere could be separated from the freedom of the private sphere where conscience was entitled to make moral judgments. Hence the formulation of the modern political motto: believe anything, but obey. And Luther's creative distinction of the two discourses — the relative discourse of order that should reasonably rule everyday life and the absolute paradoxical discourse about the human condition of *simul iustus et peccator*, *totus, totus* — received an authoritarian straitjacket against which so much criticism has been voiced.

The danger of such a development is one of splitting or separating the two realities so that autonomy is attributed to the institutionalized realm, whilst theological discourse hovers above the real concerns of everyday existence, addressing the conscience of an atomic individual (which Nietzsche called the "newest creation"). This is what Lutheran orthodoxy tended to do in the seventeenth century with the separation of ethics from dogmatics removing the Christian imperative from social existence. The experience gained from the holocaust and of authoritarian political regimes in this century have made us aware of the dangers such an argument entails. Two well-known attempts to correct this problem have been made. They have received theological support beyond the circles from which they originally emerged and have influenced for example many liberation theologies.

The Reformed tradition with its modern sensibilities proposed a "third use of the law" in addition to the "first" one (the political use) and the "second" (the theological use). It is to bridge the gap between justification and justice, so that the former could be extended and positively recognized in the latter. This has been a

legitimate concern to counteract the tendency to regard society as an autonomous entity and ethics as something that can be decided on the basis of reason alone without any need to appeal to Christian values.

Another proposal came from so-called dialectical theology which calls for the radical understanding of the Lordship of Christ as God's command in the context of social existence. The difference between the defense of a "third use" of the law and the ethics of God's command is that the first entails a positive formulation of ethical axioms to be followed by Christians while the latter assesses the command of God as a negative word directed against all *hybris*, all human self-centered pretentiousness and will power.

The problem with the first solution is that it aims at presenting a Christian option for social organization and will easily lead either to a renewed form of Christianity or to sectarianism. The conviction that there can be a Christian ethos which can be embodied and lived out as an alternative and challenging ethos with formative power over a culture has left a record of admirable witness and even martyrdom. However, it has also been easily transfigured into imposing, heteronomic attitudes of disregard, contempt, or even violation of cultures and civilizations as the history of colonialism only too frequently illustrates. Justification, then, is often measured by welfare, as Max Weber pointed out.

The second stance — the negative approach to social issues on the basis of the radical affirmation of the Lordship of Christ — has, for its clear awareness of the demonic element in the exercise of power and its deep suspicion of power relations in spite of all zealous and good intentions with which they might be invested, been a frequent and most needed approach to recurrent forms of idolatry. Between justification and justice there is no equation, no mediation: justice has no other criterion of its own but to subject oneself exclusively to God's command. However, the presupposition that the quest for justice will be a quest for power after power has failed to recognize adequately that in

actual power relations the power of the powerless ("counter-hegemony" as opposed to "hegemony") has not only been a way to survive but also a way of resisting and limiting the tyrannical tendencies of hegemonic power. Oppressed and subaltern groups in society have regarded the negative approach to justice as being inadequate, if not suicidal, to bring about the necessary exercise of counter-hegemonic power (the empowerment of the powerless) for the achievement of justice.

If we do not want to attribute autonomy to the social sphere, the problem then lies in finding the theological criterion for justice without it being a positive expression of justification, nor a sheer negative stance towards power in the face of the recognition of God's absolute and exclusive sovereignty. A glance back to Luther's insight might be helpful.

In classical Lutheranism there is a curious asymmetry in the relation between the law and the gospel. While the law is divided into two uses (each corresponding to its function in each of the two realms), the gospel is parallel only with the "theological" use. Even the designation "theological" leads one to suppose that the "political" is devoid of theological significance. This has led to a very pessimistic understanding of the human worldly condition, lived under the political use of the law that in itself would entail no hope or novelty (*pax mundi non speranda*). The gospel was turned into a universal category dissociated from common everyday experience where no novelty, no good news was to be expected. But why should we not speak theologically about quotidian hopes, about health, food, shelter, security, friendship, love, and so many everyday signs of good news that improve the quality of life, without the need to equate them with the ultimate values of the kingdom? That means: Can we not speak theologically about the divine signs of grace even if they are only contingent, particular and relative? Obviously the question is what criteria are to be adopted for differentiating relative good from evil in the midst of everyday experience?

In the Christian tradition this has not been a forgotten dimension, but has frequently, particularly in contemporary theology, been undervalued. Overly concerned with christology, some contemporary theology deserves to be called a "unitarianism of the second article" (H Richard Niebuhr), which, as much as secularism, has meant the loss of what James Gustafson called the theocentric perspective.

This points to the need to recognize creation theology as a separate and distinct source of the theological evaluation of our way in the world. A creation theology is needed for at least two interconnected reasons. First, because it allows for criteria to outline positively our experience in the world. Secondly, because it provides for a common ground for dialogue with any culture which in its mythical nucleus will also have a story of the beginnings.

To say that creation is the first act of salvation tends to subsume creation into the ultimate language of redemption. Creation is not only to be seen in the perspective of a history of salvation, but of a worldly history in and through which we confess that God creates the space for human belonging.

The classical criteria can here be referred to without further elaboration. It suffices to point to the nucleus of the Judeo-Christian myth, the story that weaves our sense of belonging. It entails an organic and metabolic relation with nature (human beings cultivate the soil, the humus, from which the creature of earth is taken: labor is the continuation of the metabolism implied in the organic exchange between *adam* and *adamah*) and a dialogical relation with other human beings (the *imago dei* is a profile recognized only in togetherness, the radical affirmation of egalitarianism). Both novelty and sin can be defined by whether they conform to or break with these two criteria. They are penultimate criteria, ambiguous ones, but nevertheless criteria that can provide a basis for discerning in everyday experience signs of life and death, and thus provide us with a working definition of justice, without compromising or separating from it the sense of awe and wonder in the face of the ultimate mystery that justification language frames brings about.

In pointing to these two criteria I have come full circle and am back at the point of departure: the quest for the third bank of the river. This "third bank" has always been with us in the stories we recount about where we come from, how old we are, and when fear arrived, even if these stories, the myths embedded in the world, have been distorted or covered by the high tide of disenchantment in the river of modernity.

If Luther moved away from the myth embodied and transubstantiated in the cage of the medieval institutions pointing to two distinct languages, one that opened windows to heaven, and another, doors to the world, then modernity has driven us out into a rainy night. The same doors will allow us re-entry and we will know that it will be a shelter for us with open doors and windows without bars.

The Difficult Path from Justification to Justice

by Mercedes García Bachmann

Introduction

In preparing myself for this paper I realized that the question of justice and justification is far broader than I had previously thought. It covers anything from theological matters (such as Christ, christology, ecclesiology, and the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms) to non-theological matters such as politics, women, peace, justice, land distribution, etc.

Furthermore, I discovered that in 1985, theologians from North, Central and South America met in Mexico to discuss "Justification and Justice". The participants were scholars from different academic fields. In this paper I have used the report that came out of that conference. Furthermore, Dr Elsa Tamez has written a most inspiring article on the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith as the affirmation of life and Dr Gottfried Brakemeier published a booklet containing a number of lectures one of which is very relevant to our topic. Other writers such as Leonardo Boff pay explicit and implicit attention to the matter.

Since one could write several volumes about this subject I intend to limit myself to some random thoughts on God's and human justice.

Needless to say this not an in-depth research; it is merely an attempt to share some insights into and concerns about this important and challenging matter. If it were to stimulate others to go into more depth my purpose would be fulfilled.

God's and human justice

The first assertion I would like to make is that we can match God's justice and God's justification. This may at first seem too daring because we have on the whole developed very strict ideas about what is theologically sound. If, however, we turn to the Bible we find many statements about God's salvation in which his acts of liberation (and therefore the restoration of justice) are recalled. Moses' song (Ex 15) and Mary's Magnificat are just two examples of this.

When we look at the biblical stories we discover that the covenant God made with Israel did not come before but after the salvation events of the exodus. Therefore, justice should not be regarded as being the mere application of the commandments (jurisprudence). Application does not automatically guarantee true justice.

Justification and justice (both divine and human) have to do with a new way of setting and re-setting relationships, loyalties, needs and rights. It must not be seen as a set of different and isolated facts, but as a living (mobile) combination. Time and again we have seen God's efforts turn this combination towards life and not death.

God's justice in the Old Testament

Starting with the exodus events (although we could go as far back as Gen 4) we find God establishing a new social order in which the cries of the underprivileged, the oppressed and the forgotten are heard. This is a never-ending endeavor, since those who benefit first seem to be the future oppressors. Until the institution of the monarchy the "enemies" were on the outside, and the judges the ones to lead men into war. They were more like military leaders than ordinary judges. After the institution of the monarchy however, the definition of who were the "enemies" depended on which side one stood. For the king and his court the Egyptians, Assyrians, etc. were the "outside" enemies; for God's prophets however it was the rulers or judges of the people themselves.

God's law retains its importance, not just as a commandment, but rather as a system which after the acts of liberation and the covenant should bring a salvific reality into daily life.

God's justice in the New Testament

In the New Testament we find something radically new. It is not however as new as many people think. Not new in the sense of abolishing everything God has said so far. New, because fulfillment has finally been reached. Justice and justification become a reality, not only as promises. God's salvation through Jesus Christ changes the world. How is this seen in the New Testament? There are several trends (one per writer). If, for instance, we take Matthew (and do not read him as if he were Paul) we see that Jesus is the new Moses who through his own being brings the new covenant into being. Justice is depicted as something "greater" than the one practiced by the Pharisees, as something secret (between God and the person) and directed towards the community.

Other writers take other stances. The prophetic figure is highlighted by the evangelists, while the priestly image is taken up in the Letter to the Hebrews. John speaks of love, but not in the sense of being in love. It means doing as God who "so loved the world that he gave his only son" (John 3:16) did. As it says in 1 John 2:9 "He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still".

The stories of the suffering, the death and the resurrection of Christ are very clear about what God means by justice. He takes upon himself an endeavor we could not manage ourselves; he frees us from sin, in order for us not to have to worry about our life but to be able to devote it to the needs of others.

Luther

It almost seems too banal to speak about Luther's statements on God's justice, since they are the bases upon which our whole Lutheran identity has been built. However, it should be stated that Luther's starting point was his anxiety to please God. In

this endeavor he ended up on the opposite side, in fear and hatred. It is from this very human reality that the biblical answer comes: not the law, but grace. Human justice can only be acceptable to God, when it comes as our answer, our offering to God, and not before that. Since it is not through any kind of human deed (not even a covenant), Luther guarantees salvation as God's justice, because that is God's work for everybody. Furthermore, he will help anybody who appeals to him in pain, in oppression, and in anguish.

According to Luther, faith is the unshakable certainty about God's grace. His focus changes the view of the world, because it is not centered on human behavior, but on God. Faith is therefore put in the human "heart" after God's justice has already been realized. This means that there are no barriers and that he receives everybody who calls his name.

God's justice in today's Europe-oriented theology

It seems to me that most of Lutheran theology and church identity in Latin America can be seen as Europe-oriented. Despite the fact that our ancestors are not to be blamed for the churches' mistakes, it must nevertheless be mentioned that mistakes were made.

One of those mistakes is the individualistic, personal idea of salvation. God has saved me, it is my faith and my works. If my neighbor has problems, maybe I can help him or her, but it remains his or her problem and not ours.

Luther's concept of the two kingdoms has been used to justify violence, injustice, totalitarian regimes, etc., because it was thought that the church should not interfere in politics. God's work was therefore seen as opposite to his people's work. God's salvation in personal terms was seen as the only possible work; making void any human effort towards justice, love, peace.

One other problem is the concept of *sola fide* and *sola gratia* as being opposed to any human action, either before or afterwards. Both Paul and John speak of faith, of love, of God's initiative,

but at the same time they speak of loving one another, our neighbors, our enemies. Luther's thinking is essentially along the same lines and he has something very interesting to say about the creativeness of love. I recommend also his sermon on the two faces of justice.

God's justice in today's Third World-oriented theology

One of the favorite themes in Latin American theology is the exodus, because it shows how God acts in favor of his people, and his people are, in that text, all those who claim him because of their being oppressed. There are no favorite ones, or covenants to be put in the first place, but justice, peace, and the well-being of every human creature. It is true that the Old Testament speaks of the covenant God made with his friends, with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But throughout the Bible there are references to a justice which goes beyond what we can understand ourselves and extends to the needy, the poor, the foreigners.

Latin American theology has developed out of the conviction that God cares for the whole of creation, and that the political arena is not an alien field into which committed Christians are not to enter. On the contrary, God himself entered into it, first through Moses, later on through the Kings of Israel and lastly, through his only son he continues to work in our world through us Christians and other people who take up his cause.

Human justice in the Old Testament

Throughout the Old Testament we find various stories pointing to what God expects of his people in terms of justice. In the story of Cain and Abel we see many important facts apart from jealousy. The two brothers represent two different and often opposing worlds: city and country, production and consumption, power and oppression. Other stories from Genesis show us also a world in which God is present but many things still have to be completed.

After the exodus in the time of the Judges many stories of unrighteousness are told which are subsequently "justified" by the argument: in those days there were no kings in Israel, and everybody did what they wanted to do. The monarchy seems therefore to be the time of orderly behavior. Officially only so to speak, because the prophets show us that it was not the ideal, messianic time. Often the prophets had to speak up against kings and queens, official prophets and magicians, priests and powerful social classes because they distorted God's concept of justice.

As previously mentioned, Matthew took the Jewish concept of justice, at least as the Pharisees understood it, and showed that what God wanted was something new. New in terms of purpose, but also in terms of results. When the prophets said "You say 'peace, peace', but there is no peace" or when they claimed that "God prefers loving kindness rather than sacrifices", they were pointing to this new righteousness.

Justice in the Old Testament means taking care of everyone who is under God's covenant, especially widows, orphans, sick people, and also foreigners. This is related to the covenant between God and Israel on Mount Sinai, and is therefore not related to others. But it should at least have been applied to them.

But actually this is a more difficult problem because the main issue is that justice has been reduced to jurisprudence. Justice cannot be reduced to such an extent because it is a far broader concept and jurisprudence can also be very unjust. It depends on isolated applications, and does not have the overview.

Time and again God reminds his people that what is expected of them is a consequence of the covenant, it is to be their response to God's salvific act. This makes it more serious when God's law is used to strengthen the powerful.

Human justice in the New Testament

Of course human justice is related to Jesus, both to his deeds and his teaching. In this matter, fulfillment has already been achieved not only by any human being, but by Jesus Christ. He is the only one who therefore has the moral authority to question the law. Through his being condemned by the law, he shows to the world that the law can be used very unjustly and the innocent can be condemned to shame and death.

Disciples can and sometimes even should question the law when it does not serve God's purposes, but those of the powerful. Christians are called to practice a new justice, a more radical one, in order to be saved by it. Although in some lessons the idea remains that we are to be judged according to our deeds.

In Matthew, the term used for the religious Christian is not righteous, but disciple. In chapter 5 Matthew starts with the "higher righteousness" (a Jewish concept, because the Pharisees and other groups were considered to be righteous) and turns to concepts such as discipleship, God's will or kingdom.

In Paul's letters we find the basis for our theological trends. They have often been misunderstood, because they have been kept in the same conceptual frame, despite the fact that the context has changed radically. In Paul's thinking, justification (= God's justice) comes first and foremost and entails justice among humans. This justice is radically new, because the ones justified do not need to care for their own life, but have received new life (in Paul, eternal life) despite all that they see and suffer around them. We will revert to that.

Just one more example. James has long been considered Paul's counterpart if not enemy. However, recent studies show that he does not propitiate human deeds as a means of salvation, but he argues against an intellectual faith, according to which simply adhering to a doctrinal building would be enough to achieve salvation.

Human justice in Luther

In her response to Prof Roberto Hoferkamp at the previously mentioned consultation on justification and justice, Ms Duane Priebe refers to one of Luther's writings which contains the following ideas: my knowledge is not mine but belongs to the uneducated; the power I handle is not mine but belongs to the powerless. Hence, I must put my knowledge, my power and everything I have at the disposal of those to whom they belong.

Faith follows the hearing of the good news and is not necessary for our salvation, because the latter comes only from God through Christ. However, Luther says it becomes the most important work, because it fulfills the first commandment. And when God becomes our God, his commandments become our delight: to love one another, to care for everybody's rights, to practice true justice and not just to let the rulers do so. It is interesting, however, that, according to Luther, the church must keep its freedom, especially to speak out against evil governments.

Human justice in the Europe-oriented theology

In first-world theology, salvation is experienced as a personal matter, related to having escaped from God's terrible justice which we surely deserve. In the revised Spanish version of the Bible, "God's justice" has been replaced by being in peace or having peace with God. Since peace is a broader concept than justice, it is a good translation. However, the traditional evangelical milieu tends to think of spiritual well-being as meaning the absence of internal conflicts and psychological security.

Lutheran theology has very rightly given preference to grace, God's initiative and justification by faith alone. However, it seems that Paul's theological approach has taken too much precedence over the historical Jesus as he appears in the gospels. We have inherited a very mild ethical engagement, mainly due to

the fear of "seeking good works for our salvation". There are, on the other hand, personal, almost private good works, but they are not connected with the community. They are not seen as a whole, a part of which is *diakonia*, another part stewardship, another one praise, and still another one *koinonia*, etc.

Human justice in Latin American Theology

Some remarks have already been made in previous paragraphs. Perhaps the most interesting thing to come out of Latin America is not the different writings but the methodology.

The methodological questions are important because they illustrate the Latin American concept of theology. If for instance we take hunger or oppression as *an example* in our theological system, it will not have great importance, because it is only an example. If, on the contrary, it is a methodological question that opens our theological thinking about God's plans, God's action, human justice, etc., is it then not more important? Liberation theology has very rightly emphasized that we start our theological thinking from experience, not from a indisputable universal system.

Justice and righteousness are not exactly the same as observing a legal system, because the system does not observe justice. It tends to maintain the *status quo*: every kind of change, proposed or actually tried out, is regarded as being subversive, as a violation. It does not discuss "the order" which is a disorder.

Jesus Christ, our model, shows us the difficulties inherent in the legal system, even though it comes from God. The system does not protect the powerless and the innocent, on the contrary. Latin American theology therefore regards Jesus as a prophet, a liberator, the historical person, as the model of justice. The kingdom of God means new life, not only eternal life after death, but also a new way of living and of being considered, already now. By practicing this new justice, by fighting for everybody's rights and dignity we realize God's kingdom. This sounds too daring to those Protestants, for whom the kingdom is always God's work.

However, if we accept Jesus' words: the kingdom has come, then we could embark on a dialogue by which we accept that God works through us. Our problems have to do with a totalitarian, vertical concept of power and action which automatically excludes either God or us.

In the report of the consultation on justification and justice, Prof Vitor Westhelle proposes that the doctrine of justification be radically re-defined, not in ethical but doxological terms. The quest for a loving God and for his answers to the history of humanity have to do with his being a God who hears his people and afterwards makes a covenant. Therefore it is his own glory and good name which are at stake. The ethical answers then become relative and this helps not to deify *any* socio-political system.

One other important aspect related to the matter of justice is how personal and social aspects of justification relate to personal and social aspects of the human response, i.e., human righteousness. Is our salvation a personal matter, and therefore exempt from any social engagement? Or is it a matter for a whole community, people we are a part of?

Some matters of special relevance

Sin

When we speak of justification by faith from our sins, we are to define what sin means and what it implies. In general terms, we can say that it is anything that separates us from God and thus could include almost anything. We have to make it more concrete. It depends on the context from which one speaks. Luther spoke of pride. Others have spoken of power and women speak of lack of self-assertion and self-confidence. We see that the manifestation of our rebellion against God changes our concept of what sin includes. Basically sin is to be against God.

But to be against God means to be against our neighbors. Sin has therefore a social dimension which cannot be overlooked. Our deeds affect our relationship with God but first of all they affect others around us. Sin is therefore not a private matter between

God and me. If we are then justified, we are also socially justified, or in other words, salvation is not a personal matter between God and me.

Christology

One of the Latin American theologians who has worked on this matter is Jon Sobrino. Hoferkamp made a good criticism of his system. For Latin Americans the main problem is that according to Sobrino, Jesus brought about the kingdom by his faith and through this he came close to the father, and our main expression of faith would be doing the same as Jesus did and thus to become God's children. His criticism of cultural and religious systems which do not care for love and justice is still valid. However, it is not we who can realize the kingdom, only God can do so. We cannot do what Jesus did, but we should do what he said. According to Sobrino's system, doing the same as Christ did is both grace and praxis. As far as it does not turn salvation into a law by which we achieve salvation there are always possibilities for combining God and human action.

As for Luther, we will see that Christ in fact determines the two kingdoms under which we live. Christ is then both the gift and the giver. He is the angel, the messenger who makes a new hermeneutics possible for us.

The relationship between faith and works

Today this no longer seems to be a matter of discussion. We appear to agree especially with the Roman Catholic Church that the sixteenth century controversy has been solved. On the other hand we still have to solve it internally because most of our people feel that they do not have to do anything, not even as a means of witness or gratitude. Luther's writings are very powerful on how Christians are called by God to work for justice, education, peace and a new community. Nobody can escape from this responsibility.

The churches in the Third World are daily confronted by many enormous tasks so that it is impossible for them not to see where God is calling them: to the indigenous groups claiming recognition for their rights. The most affected are women, children, the elderly, disabled people, the poorly educated and the sick. If our faith does not move us to action, it is a blind faith. But blind as Isaiah announced it: the fat in the hearts does not allow any compassion (Isa 6:9-10).

Justification as the affirmation of life

Tamez's very interesting analysis of Paul's writings starts with the affirmation of justification by faith and shows how Paul's experiences and background have brought him to this statement, and how later on, it lost its power.

Paul states that the truth has been imprisoned by untruth, by an evil system which is based upon the law! Since the whole system is untrue, the only way for people to escape is through the unmasking of the law, which condemns the truly innocent. This happens in Christ. From then on, the law does not have to be obeyed blindly because it goes against God.

Abraham was justified precisely because he disobeyed the law; it said that the first born had to be given to the gods. In an inverted society, only the ones who recognize it and acknowledge themselves as deceitful can take the new order issued by Christ.

As sin is related to idolatry (and as Gustavo Gutiérrez pointed out, in the Bible ideology is tainted by the stains of the innocent blood, present in each system in which creatures are adored instead of the Creator), so justification is related to the affirmation of life. And this affirmation has to be brought about especially in two fields: in the socio-economic and political system, which condemns many to death, and along with it, in the experiences of segregation, humiliation and the denial of human conditions to many groups: black, mulatto, mestizo, women, the poor, the sick and children. (While writing I am listening to radio reports on the disturbances in Los Angeles, due to the distortion of justice.)

The doctrine of the two kingdoms

This has been one of the most difficult matters in Lutheran theology, because even in Luther's writings it is not unequivocal. At the consultation on justice and justification Prof Walter Altmann pointed out that in 1530 Luther interpreted Psalm 82 as a political psalm from which he drew the following conclusions: God is about to judge the princes and therefore the church is a vehicle for their judgment. The political office has the duty of first (and not by chance) guaranteeing the free, critical and prophetic preaching of the gospel, secondly to care for justice and the rights of the powerless and thirdly to guarantee order, peace and the protection of the forsaken.

From this it is clear that Luther warned against the church leaving its mission to take up temporal political power. On the other hand, this political power is responsible for the church being granted its rights. Furthermore, it is responsible for providing Christian education in the schools.

What is at stake here is that there are two different worlds, the one with Christ, the other without Christ. The doctrine then becomes a hermeneutical tool with which reality must be confronted. It is interesting how eagerly we confront the political powers and systems, but we should be as eager to discuss the political realm within the church.

On the other hand, Christians in the Third World reaffirm daily that political participation and confrontation is not the only, but the main issue in order to ensure that their participation is more effective. Although the two kingdoms (church and political society) are different, we are called to bring God's good news to both of them. As was pointed out, it is far more dangerous when we deify a political or economic system than if we "secularize" ourselves by engaging in our society.

Some conclusions

There is much more to be said, shared and especially to be done. Justice from God can only be fully comprehended when actually experienced. Therefore we have to realize that there are realms in our life and our society that need to be set free and liberated. In our thinking we need creativeness based upon love and care, upon a true righteousness among people.

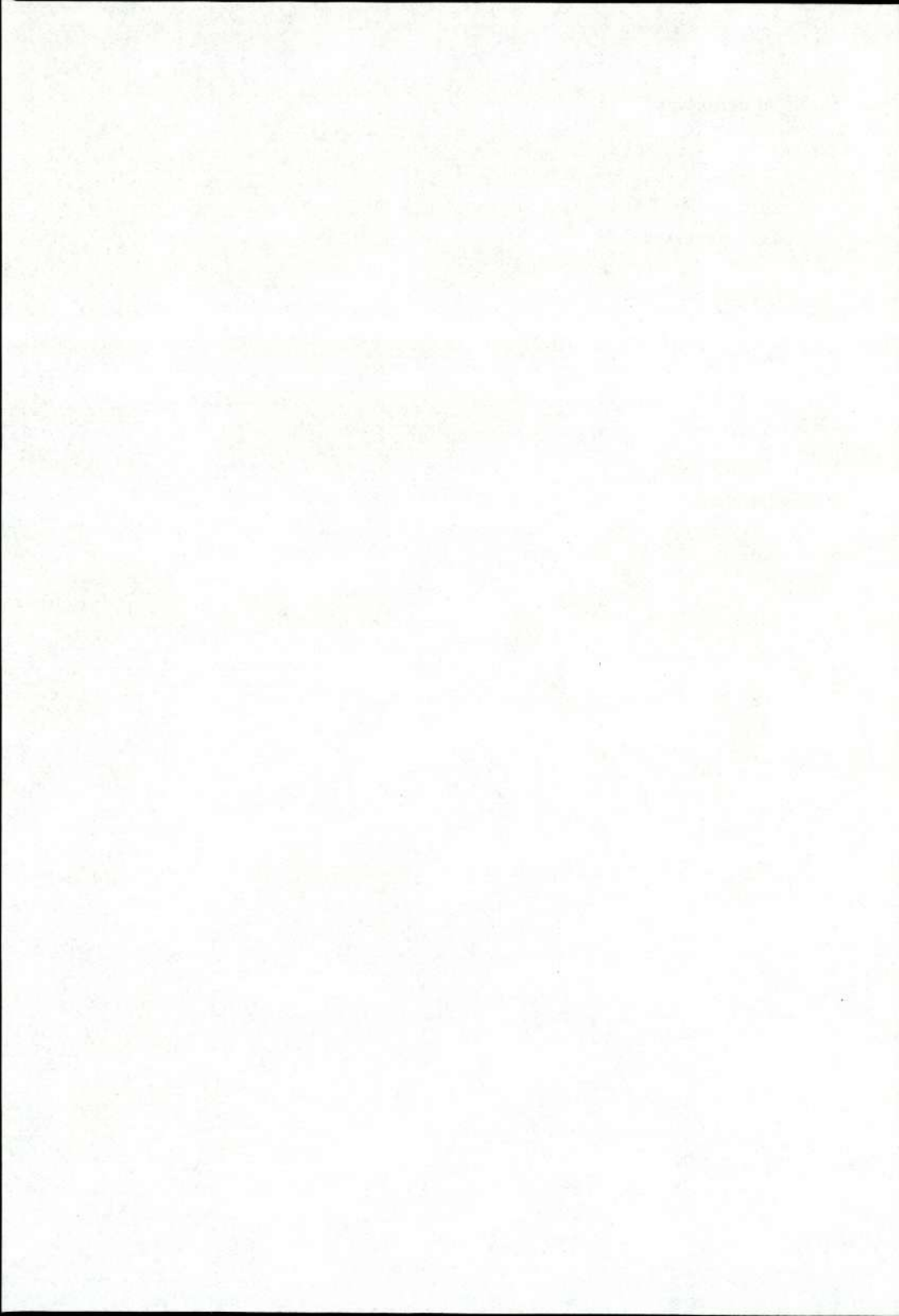
We need the courage to speak out against every situation and realm in which the justice we have been given is not conferred upon others. We are called to re-interpret our own doctrines in favor of those for whom they were also revealed: the ones who fear the Lord, the Lord of history, of life and justice.

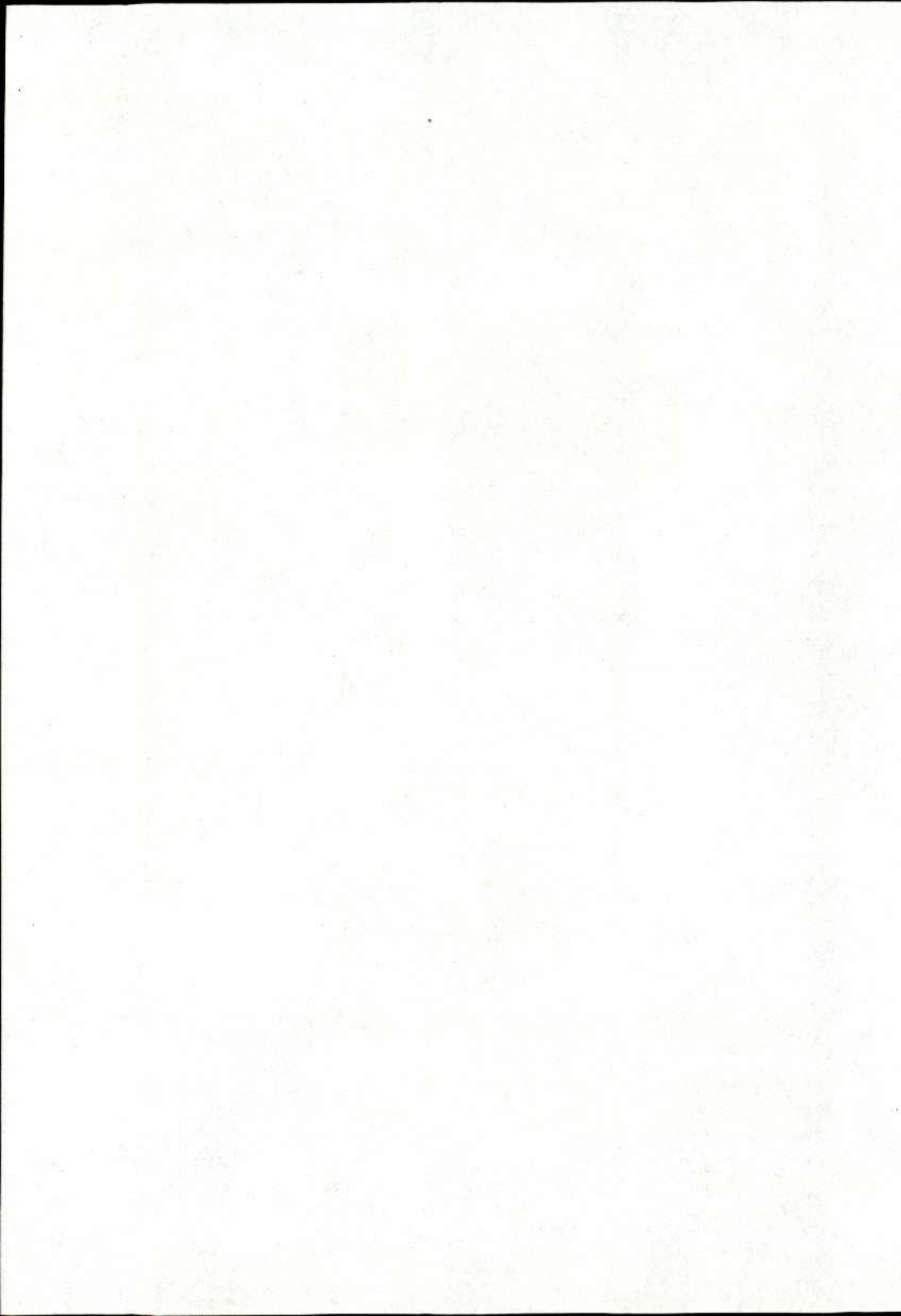
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